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Wm. Sir J. B. Wright, Esq. M.D.

REMARKS

ON

SCHOOLS OF INSTRUCTION
FOR MILITARY AND NAVAL SURGEONS,

IN A LETTER TO

THE RIGHT HON. SIR ROBERT PEEL, BART.

BY

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SIR,

To your patronage I am indebted for the situation I hold in this University; and to you therefore I venture to address myself on a subject which necessarily occupies much of my attention,—the instruction of Medical Officers for the Army and Navy.

I have recently visited the Garrison Hospitals of Paris, the Gros Caillou, and the Val de Grace, with the School of Medicine attached to the latter; and I have, within these few days, returned from a professional visit to the Military Hospitals in Prussia, in Austria, and in Belgium.

I have been much struck with the liberal provision made by some of these foreign states, particularly Prussia and Austria, for the education of their Army Surgeons, in comparison with the very scanty provision made for the same purpose by our own Government. This liberality is the more remarkable, in proportion as it appears to me the less called for.

With the single exception of the French Surgeons serv-

ing in Algeria, the Surgeons of the continental armies are exclusively occupied in the treatment of diseases occurring in their own climate,—diseases which are familiar to every practitioner of experience, whether in civil or in military life. What again is the case with our Army and Navy Surgeons? Two-thirds of them are constantly occupied in the treatment of formidable and fatal diseases, incident to soldiers and seamen on foreign stations and in tropical climates,—diseases with which neither practitioners nor teachers in this country are, of necessity, practically acquainted. While, then, on the continent, where little peculiarity of instruction is required by the Army Surgeon, institutions for his education abound; in this country, where the duties devolving on the Army and Navy Surgeon are of a peculiar and onerous description, little facility is given for his special instruction.

Of the “Hospitals of Instruction” for the Medical Officers of the French army, established at Strasburg, at Metz, and at Lille, I am unable to speak from personal observation; but I would briefly notice two establishments which I have recently seen, the institution of Frederick William II. at Berlin, and the Josephinum Academy at Vienna. The former of these was destined by its royal founder, “in the first place to receive the Surgical Staff of the Field Hospitals, which had acquired experience in the war with France, and to preserve it to the country; and in the next place to provide for the Field Hospitals in future, a supply of well educated Surgeons.” The Josephinum at Vienna is justly said to be “one of the most truly imperial establishments in the city.” This institution, said to be supported at an annual expense of

nearly L.5000, with its magnificent anatomical collection, its large Hospital and Clinical School, its numerous able and talented professors, was established by the Emperor, whose name it bears, as “ a School of Medicine for the special purpose of supplying medical men to the Austrian army.”

“MUNIFICENTIA ET AUSPICIIS IMP. CÆS. JOSEPHI II. P. F. SCHOLA MEDICO-CHIRURGICA MILITUM MORBIS ET VULNERIBUS CURANDIS SANANDISQUE INSTITUTA ÆDE ET OMNI SUPPELECTILI SALUTARIS ARTIS INSTRUCTA.”

Let us now compare these institutions with the very limited provision made for similar purposes in Great Britain, namely, the establishments at Chatham, at Haslar, and at Plymouth, and the professorship of Military Surgery in the University of Edinburgh. The Museums attached to the great Military and Naval Hospitals in England, most creditable as they are to the Heads of the Medical Departments, and to the zeal and public spirit of the Medical Officers of the service, are very inadequately patronized by the Government. They are, in fact, more the creations of the departments, than the institutions of the State.

The Hospitals, again, to which these collections are respectively attached, however valuable they may be as Schools of Morbid Anatomy and Pathological inquiry, are but little calculated to instruct young men in the treatment, or, what is of more importance, in the prevention of those diseases for which their best energies are required. A large proportion of the diseases falling to be treated in these Hospitals, are not the diseases incident to men in the vigour of life, who, by prompt and efficient treatment, may be preserved to the service; but are, in many instances, the cases of men already

lost to the service, in consequence of confirmed and incurable organic disease.

But even admitting, to the fullest extent, the utility of these Museums and Hospitals to young men entering the army, I would ask how far they are available to another and very important class of pupils,—to men returning from a protracted absence on foreign stations, with the double purpose of renovating their health, and renewing their professional knowledge. I know well what it is to have served in the distant regions of India, secluded for years from the companionship of books, and from all intercourse with the lights of the profession. I have seen, with much pleasure, the facilities so judiciously afforded, by the present distinguished heads of the Medical Departments of the Army and Navy, to gentlemen so situated, to resume their professional studies,—a clear index of their opinion of its necessity; and I have witnessed with delight the avidity with which these gentlemen avail themselves of the opportunities here offered of recovering their lost ground, and qualifying themselves to take their place amongst the well informed members of the profession. But it is not to Chatham, to Portsmouth, or to Plymouth, that such men will resort. It is to the metropolitan cities of the empire to which they will naturally look for the most recent, the most satisfactory, and the most authentic information on the progress of science, and on the improvements in Medicine which have taken place during their absence.

While much of the information which such men naturally desire, is, I readily admit, to be obtained from the usual courses of Medicine and Surgery as delivered in the schools, it is not too much to expect that there should be in each of

the three divisions of the kingdom at least one Establishment, under the patronage of the Government, to which they may resort as a matter of right, where they will be sure to find at least one Professor conversant with the nature of their duties, who can enter into their wants and wishes, and who is constantly employed in directing their attention to those subjects which constitute the business of their lives; where they will meet with their brethren in the same department of the service, from every quarter of the world, and from intercourse with whom mutual benefit may be derived. I would ask the numerous gentlemen in the Army, the Navy, and the Honourable East India Company's service, who have frequented the class of Military Surgery during the last twenty years, whether they have not obtained, from such intercourse, great and obvious advantages. I have already given my opinion, "that much valuable information is annually lost to the public from there not being, in each of the metropolitan schools, at least one Professor or Lecturer, whose attention is specially directed to the topics embraced in the course of Military Surgery, and to whom gentlemen returning from foreign service might freely communicate their observations."

The Chair of Military Surgery in this University was instituted in the person of my immediate predecessor, the learned and venerable Dr Thomson, author of a much esteemed work on "Inflammation," and of a "Report of the state of the Wounded in Belgium after the Battle of Waterloo." Its institution was, I believe, originally grounded on a memoir addressed to the First Lord of the Admiralty, after the battle of Camperdown, by the late Mr John Bell,—a memoir, every word of which I might quote with advantage to my present

object, but I only advert to the very accurate conception which the author had formed of the duties of a Professor of Military Surgery, to say how perfectly it coincides with my own. After alluding to the essentials of Anatomy, and to the great principles of Surgery, Mr Bell goes on to observe, "These general principles of the science must next be applied to the peculiar duties of the Military Surgeon; the Professor must teach carefully the peculiar nature of gun-shot wounds.

"He must deliver a short code of Military Medicine, explaining the fevers, fluxes, spasms, infectious diseases, and all the peculiar duties of the camp and the hospital; he must also explain the scurvy, ulcers, and all the disorders most frequent in ships of war.

"He must teach Medical Geography; the climates, seasons; coasts of various countries; the manner of conducting soldiers on a foreign expedition; the general care of their health; the choice of encampments; the forming of hospitals on shore; how to convert churches, granaries, public buildings, into occasional hospitals; how to attend an army in the field; how to lay the wounded in besieged towns; how to carry them off the field in a retreating army.

"Along with these must be taught Military Economics, —diet, exercise, clothing, general medicine, and all methods of preventing disease. Without this knowledge, no man is entitled to serve. How few are thus taught! How few are fit for service! How few are there who are not conscious of those blurs and blots in their general education, which no diligence of their own can ever do away!

"The last and not the least important duty of the teacher

should be to point out for his pupils a future plan of study; to make for them a selection of books; to deliver critical and practical observations on those which are to be most used. The teacher must not only instruct his pupils for the present, he must select objects for their future study. He must teach them this truth, that their education is only begun, and that the best of their studies remain as yet untouched; he must show them how to think for themselves, and then he may hope to reap in his turn the fruit of their labours, and live to see their observations and cases published under his own care."

Within these few months, the *Senatus Academicus* of this University has, upon my recommendation, procured for the instruction of this Class, and for the use of the Medical Students generally, the valuable collection of preparations made during the recent campaign of the British Legion of Spain, by Mr Rutherford Alcock; a collection almost exclusively illustrative of Gunshot-wounds—so far as I know, quite unique in its kind—and which, with the small collection of preparations, models, casts, and drawings, which I had previously made, will enable the Professor, in future years, to conduct the business of this class with increased advantage. I feel that the liberality of the *Senatus Academicus* upon this occasion deserves the gratitude of the public. I feel that it has done what might, not inappropriately, have been done by the Government; and I feel that it has laid me under a load of responsibility which I am desirous to meet by increased exertion. But I feel, at the same time, very forcibly, that upwards of seven-and-thirty years have now elapsed since I first entered the army as an Hospital Mate, and that, conse-

quently, I am arrived at a time of life when my exertions are ill able to keep pace with my wishes.

There is one other source of information for the Medical Officers of the Army and Navy, to which I would briefly allude, and with which you, Sir, as a Member of Parliament, must necessarily be acquainted, I mean the "Statistical Reports on the Sickness, Mortality, and Invaliding among the Troops," and the "Statistical Reports on the Health of the Navy." These have been prepared at an enormous amount of labour to the authorities at the Horse Guards, the Medical Board, and the Admiralty, and at a very considerable pecuniary expense to the public. All this labour, all this expense will, I confidently assert, be in a great measure lost to the service, unless means are taken to concentrate the valuable information embodied in these reports, to put it in an attractive and impressive form, and to keep it constantly before the present and the rising generation of Army and Navy Surgeons.

Having now, I believe, noticed all the sources of information specially adapted to the Medical Officers of the Public Service, I would observe, that the first, the General Hospitals, are in a great measure unavailable to a numerous and important body, the Medical Officers returning from foreign stations; the second, the Lectures delivered in this University, are only accessible to a very limited number, and this hitherto by favour of the Professor, not as a matter of right; and that the third, the Statistical Reports, are in their present shape too voluminous to be consulted with facility, or to be carried about with convenience. What then is the remedy I would propose? Simply the endowment of a Professorship of

Military Surgery in the King's College, or in one of the Central Medical Schools in London, and a similar establishment in the University or at the College of Surgeons in Dublin.

I am well aware that in advocating any establishment connected with the purposes of warfare, I shall perhaps meet with little sympathy in the public mind, which has now, for a series of years, been so wisely and so well devoted to a cultivation of the arts of peace; but it has been justly observed, that "in proportion as constitutional, political, or financial circumstances render it expedient to reduce the numerical force of an army during peace, it becomes the more necessary to maintain those establishments in which practical science is upheld,—science which has been acquired in a long series of arduous and expensive training on real service." "War, and all its demoralizing and expensive consequences, are doubtless conditions not to be desired; and it becomes both nations and individuals to be prepared against its casualties and calamities. If any one institution is more necessary than another, it is that, the object of which is to diminish the number, and mitigate the severity of the various evils necessarily attendant on those engaged in Military and Naval duties."

I am also aware, that in advocating such establishments, I have professional prejudices to encounter. Frivolous and idle exceptions have been taken to the very term "Military Surgery," as if it was desired to imply by it something altogether different in principle, as well as in practice, from common Surgery. It is not for a name that I am going to contend; and although I do not myself consider the term inappropriate, I say, at once, that I wish it to be used in a very

extended sense ; as embracing not only the more strictly surgical accidents and diseases prevalent amongst the troops, the doctrine of wounds, the treatment of ulcers, venereal diseases, and ophthalmia ; but also the treatment of those internal diseases which are prevalent on foreign service, and in our numerous colonial possessions ; above all, embracing the consideration of every thing which concerns the selection of recruits, the choice of men for particular stations and duties, the diet, clothing, and exercise of troops, the position of camps, the site and construction of barracks and hospitals,—subjects, which are intimately connected with the health and efficiency of the soldier ; the diet and clothing of the seaman, the ventilation of ships ; and, in short, all that, in either branch of the service, contributes to the prevention, as well as to the cure of disease ; for it cannot be too often repeated that it is by prevention, rather than by cure, that the efficiency of our fleets and armies is to be maintained.

I will not, however, dwell longer on such objections as those to which I allude, because they come exclusively from gentlemen, whom, with all possible respect for their professional eminence, their private worth, and unquestionable talents, I cannot admit to be competent judges of this matter. I am in the habit of hearing very different sentiments from those who are conversant with the details of duty devolving on a Military or Naval Surgeon, and particularly from those whose lot it has been to spend any considerable portion of their lives abroad, either in the service of her Majesty, or of the Honorable East India Company. Upon this point I appeal to the sentiments of the public press, and to the recorded opinions of such men as the late Baron Larrey, Sir

James M'Grigor, and Mr Guthrie. The last-mentioned gentleman, in the preface to his Clinical Lectures, expresses himself thus:—"On ceasing to lecture, I may venture to say I have done that privately, which ought to be done publicly by the Government; which is done so in Edinburgh, and by every Sovereign in the great capitals of Europe. Young men, as well as old ones, require, after a few years of absence from home, to renew the knowledge they once possessed, and which perhaps they have in part forgotten, and to keep themselves up to the improvements which have taken place whilst they have been absent. When they come to London—and leave should be given for that purpose, from time to time—this opportunity should be afforded to them by the authorities; they ought not to be obliged to go about and pay again their education fees, like a parcel of students, if they have not been educated in London.

"There is a Museum at Chatham of preparations of diseases of foreign climates, many of which are unknown in England, and which, from its situation, is comparatively of little use. These preparations ought to be demonstrated, and the diseases duly taught. The specimens of natural history are many of them unique, whilst others are more splendid than any in the British Museum or elsewhere, but they are comparatively unknown. A Government that shall appropriate a piece of ground in Downing Street, when the old houses between it and George Street are pulled down, for the erection of a Museum, with apartments for the Conservator, will do themselves great honour. Let them attach to this a Professor of Physic and another of Surgery, and they will render the country an inestimable benefit. The expense need only be the difference be-

tween the half and the full-pay of these officers, and they may be otherwise employed in the public service. The saving would be that of a great number of lives."

The nomination of two Professors, which Mr Guthrie here points at, would, in many respects, be desirable, because it may so happen that a man, eminently qualified to give instructions in all that regards the health of soldiers and seamen generally, at home or abroad, may have little taste, talent, or experience in surgery; and far be it from me to depreciate in any degree the importance of the Surgical Department. I have indeed elsewhere expressed my fears, "that in a period of long protracted peace, there is some risk of the Medical Officers of the Army losing sight of the importance of the Surgical Department of their profession."

For the present, however, I would contemplate the institution of only one Professorship in each of the metropolitan schools, not doubting that many men will be found quite competent to instruct the younger part of a class in all that is essential to the preservation of the health of soldiers and seamen, and, at the same time, able to inform the seniors, who may have fallen behind the progress of Surgery, of every solid improvement which takes place in that noble art. I would restrict such appointments exclusively to the metropolitan cities; in the provincial schools they can neither be wanted, nor can they be advantageously conducted.

The endowment of such Professorships would be a matter of little expense, inasmuch, as the only men qualified to fill them with advantage, are those who have gained experience abroad in the service of their country, and who consequently have established a claim on the public to half-pay. An endowment

of the same amount as that attached to the Chair in this University, one hundred a-year, in addition to his half-pay, and the fees of pupils qualifying themselves to become candidates for commissions in the service, his rank, at the same time, going on progressively with that of his contemporaries, would form a sufficient inducement for an able and well-qualified man to become a candidate for such an appointment. It would greatly enhance the importance and utility of this appointment, without increasing the expense, were the Professor, *ex officio*, to have access, along with his pupils, under certain restrictions, to the hospitals of the Garrison. Such access has always been voluntarily conceded to me, by the kindness of the Director-General, and of the Staff and Regimental Surgeons serving in Edinburgh, and I would take this public opportunity of gratefully acknowledging my obligations to them in this respect. But I am going, perhaps, too much into matters of detail; my excuse will be found, in my anxiety to show at how little expense a great boon might be conferred on the Medical Department, and a great good done to the public.

What then would be the additional expense of all I propose—the endowment of a Professorship of Military Medicine and Surgery in London, and another in Dublin? *Two hundred pounds a-year*. Surely, Sir, this were a cheap compliment; surely it were a very becoming attention to the health of that Army and Navy which have served the nation so faithfully and so efficiently; which have preserved the country from foreign invasion, which have protected its commerce in perilous times, and which have opened up vast empires to the spirit and enterprise of the British merchant.

I have already hinted that the time has gone by when I

can have any personal interest in the result of this representation. I make it from a sense of duty to the University, to the Chair which I have the honour to fill, and to the patronage which placed me in it. I submit the matter to your consideration, with the fullest confidence, that if it shall be found to possess but one-half of the importance which I attach to it, the subject will not be overlooked; and that the patriotic views which guide your conduct as a statesman will induce you to look favourably on a proposal, which has for its object, the health and efficiency of those engaged in the Military and Naval service of the country.

I have the honour to be,

SIR,

Your very faithful,

And very obedient humble servant,

GEO. BALLINGALL.

The Right Honourable

SIR ROBERT PEEL, BART.,

&c. &c. &c. &c.